
BACKGROUND

SOLEC 2004 SUCCESS STORY

The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation Sudbury, Ontario

In Ontario, beach and dune systems are “protected” primarily by the establishment of provincial and national parks or conservation areas. Where dune systems are not included in park lands, their “protection” and management is more haphazard.

Along the Lake Huron shoreline, a non-profit environmental organization, the Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation, continues to provide technical expertise, dune ecosystem stewardship and coastal management for these and other ecosystems found along the Lake Huron coastline. Their areas of focus include water quality, coastal processes, climate change and biodiversity. Projects were completed in various Ontario communities, including Saugeen Shores and Sauble Beach.

An explanation of these activity topics and information related to their mandate is listed on their Web site (www.lakehuron.on.ca).

Improvements to the Lake Huron Coastal Ecosystem were achieved by the completion of a number of coastal stewardship projects, focused on an improved understanding of sand dune coastal processes, the important role of vegetation and the fragile nature of the dune systems. These dune systems were located in communities where both private and public lands were involved.

All projects stressed the interconnection with natural coastal protection, recreational tourism and the value of the ecosystem to the local community and its citizens. The value of these resources to the local residents and the local economy is well known; the proper management of these fragile resources was not well known.

The Dune Guidance Manual for Saugeen Shores was targeted for public works staff as previous on-site dune rehabilitation work had not fully considered the role of town staff. This document was specifically presented and explained to municipal public works and recreation staff. Heavy equipment on the beach is a necessity due to municipal infrastructure and improperly handled equipment had on occasion negatively affected the dunes when they strayed into more sensitive areas. Local landowners can now also access information regarding the dunes and adjust their management techniques accordingly.

The Beach Management Plan for Sauble Beach was prepared for the Friends of Sauble Beach, a local community group which had concerns over the lack of overall management of the dunes in this heavily used coastal area. Proper pedestrian access, vehicular parking and beach cleaning procedures were all components of beach management that needed an improved action plan and understanding.

Beach sustainability is the goal of all the beach management projects undertaken. Unsustainable activities will erode the natural resource (sand) which in many cases is not a renewable resource. Relic deposits of sand comprise many of the dune systems that if allowed to erode (blow inland) will not be replaced by another sand source.

Stakeholder involvement has been the key to the success of these initiatives, which have substantial grass roots support. In all of the main projects, cottage associations, municipal staff and politicians have participated throughout the project. This has ensured the successful implementation of the projects because the local landowners and the municipal staff members are both involved and were brought into the process in the early stages of the projects.

Monitoring of the success of the dune management documents/manuals is included in the subsequent management activities. Based on the activities of 2004, these stewardship manuals have provided needed direction and information to foster behavioral change. Signage changes, pedestrian re-routing and vehicular parking adjustments are all indications of actions completed based on the completed plans. Continued monitoring by community groups and municipal staff will ensure the success of the projects.

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For further information, please contact:

Harvey Shear
Regional Science Advisor
Environment Canada, Ontario Region
Tel: (416) 739-4704
E-mail: harvey.shear@ec.gc.ca

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